



**Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas**

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**FORMER HIDALGO COUNTY EMPLOYEE CONVICTED OF
POSSESSING CHILD PORNOGRAPHY**

[McALLEN, TX] – Aurelio Lara Zapata, 52, of McAllen, Texas, has been convicted of possessing child pornography. United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle announced today that on Thursday, March 23, 2006, Zapata entered a plea of guilty to the sole count of an indictment filed against him in January 2006.

During yesterday's hearing, Zapata admitted that on December 31, 2004, while working as an assistant purchasing agent for the Hidalgo County Purchasing Department, he acquired images and videos of child pornography and stored the pornography on his work computer.

A forensic examination of Zapata's seized work computer revealed over 50 images and 16 video movies of child pornography largely comprised of prepubescent children, that is, under the age of 10.

The investigation resulting in the indictment of Zapata is the result of a investigation initiated by the Hidalgo County Sheriff's Department in December 2004 following the discovery of the pornography on the county computer by others. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement joined the investigation and conducted the forensic examination of the computer.

United States District Court Judge Randy Crane, who presided over yesterday's hearing, and has set sentencing for Friday, June 9, 2006. Zapata faces a sentence of not more than 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and a term of up to three year supervised release term following release from prison. Zapata, who was released on a \$50,000 bond in February 2006 following his arrest has been permitted to remain free on bond pending a hearing scheduled for March 30, 2006 to determine whether Zapata has secured employment as required by his conditions of release.

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